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PSYCHOLOGY AND SCIENTIFIC METHODS

THE VALUE OF FALSE PHILOSOPHIES

PHILOSOPHY may be bad because it is poor; again, it may be bad because it is false. Poor and feeble philosophy, like sweet flowers in decay, is ill-smelling stuff; we shall leave it alone. But there are false philosophies that are not poor and weak. Unless contradictory statements can both be true, this is a category which embraces close upon half the chief systems, or half the theses of all the chief systems. This fact has appeared, to many a critic of philosophy in general, a confession of the futility of the whole endeavor; and to many a well-wisher, a cause for lament over wasted effort and great minds gone astray.

There are those who demur and say there is no difficulty in the matter. Philosophy, they assert, is not to be judged by the standards of science. It is to be judged by the standards of art or of religion. It is to be judged by standards of power and inspiration. Its truth is one and identical with its potential influence over human life. Philosophy is a human attitude, and not a theory. But judged literally by such a standard as this, the truest because the most dynamic philosophy was the Mohammedan's blind trust in the inscrutable will of Allah, as being the one and only explanation for all things in heaven and earth. From the straits of Gibraltar to the straits of Singapore, from Zanzibar and the Niger to the steppes of Turkestan, weak in numbers but great in infatuation, the irresistible armies of that faith went sweeping abroad. Is it not true that the great dynamic ideas are generally false, with at least the falseness of onesidedness? For they must never be tainted by doubt; they must not be enfeebled by critical analysis. The power and inspiration that is unaccompanied by a more homely sort of trueness, is it not a dangerous thing, having in it the seeds of persecution and fanaticism? And as for philosophy, are not truth to the facts of this world, critical aloofness, adequacy to all the manifold phases of all the multitude of real things, its first ineludible requirements?

Nevertheless there does seem to be something about a great system of philosophy which, even though we confidently believe it not to be true, does make it, somehow or other, too much worth while to

allow us to reject it as foolishness and wasted energy. It is not merely that it is a great feat of the imagination. That, in full measure, it may indeed be, and receive admiration accordingly, as we might admire Dante's vision without believing his astronomy. But considered exclusively from this standpoint, even the great systems are less satisfying than the works of minor poets and second-rate novelists. A philosophy is at once so abstracted and so pretentious a thing, that seldom does it let you forget how pertinaciously it intends to be true of the world of fact. Explicitly it insists that this is really so, and that is really so. You can not luxuriate in its fairy-land, or forget that its dreams are dreams. You are forced, at every step, to compare it with what you believe to be actual, and though your belief may be itself mistaken, it certainly precludes all artistic illusion.

So philosophy is like science. It does make a claim to scientific veracity. A philosophical system lays down propositions about the make and texture of the world, propositions that run the risk of being wrong. Hence ingenuity has been employed in plenty to make discrimination as to where science leaves off and philosophy begins. We are even told that the distinction is this: whenever a domain of knowledge reaches definiteness and exactness, it then sets up as a distinct science, while philosophy comprises the ever-diminishing residue of the muddled and confused. This would be an excellent way to annihilate the value of philosophy altogether. Yet the future sum of the sciences does promise to be conterminous with the sum of things. Once there was a time when philosophy was held to be the study of mind, the sciences studied matter; but there have now arisen the mental, the psychological sciences. Even yet we are told that philosophy is conversant with values, and science with facts; but there are already the beginnings of increasingly important sciences of values. Before long, or so it would seem, science will have appropriated to itself all the sweets of knowledge, and philosophy can enjoy them only vicariously. Philosophy is left in the situation of the little girl whose brother would not share any of his candy with her, but magnanimously offered to let her kiss him while his mouth was sticky.

Thus it stands. On the one hand, philosophy can not rival art and literature in the domains of fiction. Its fictions are dead and theirs are alive; its imaginings are skeletons, but theirs have the warmth of flesh and blood. On the other hand, philosophy would seek an abode in the districts of fact. But the serried phalanx of the sciences bars the way, and prevents approach. This is their country; no room has been left for a stranger here. What then remains for philosophy?

There is one noteworthy answer recently advanced or readvanced. Let philosophy abate her old pretensions and narrow her ambitions.

Let her become one of the sciences, the science which is the most abstract. Then as a science, with the methods of science and the impersonality of scientific inquiry, she may hope for the same success, the same constancy of progress which other sciences have enjoyed. Such is the proposal of Mr. Bertrand Russell.

That there is a possible science such as Mr. Russell looks forward to, a science of fundamental categories, of generality as such, a science of logic far more ultimate and extensive than the ordinary logic of *Barbara Celarent*—these theses we are not anxious to dispute. Nor do we doubt that decisions about matters of exceeding abstraction and generality, far remote from ordinary problems, may have astonishingly wide and important consequences. A breath of air in the Andes may send a snowflake to one side or another of a point of rock, and thereby determine whether, through glacier and mountain torrent and river, that drop of water shall reach finally the Atlantic or the Pacific. And even so, in these remote matters of abstruse inquiry, one turn or another may be taken without noticing there is an alternative, and from that point on, the dialectic gathers force and mass, everything seems swept on in one direction with inevitable convincingness, until the philosopher believes his system admits of no rival and is founded on eternal categorical necessity. Such, for example, is the really marvelous dialectic of Francis Herbert Bradley. White moves so and so, then black moves, then white again, and behold! the decision of that philosophic chess game is already recorded in the book of fate. There is an innocent-looking suggestion put forward; it seems so plausible and so little worthy of dispute that you acquiesce in it; and you are caught in the net, caught so cleverly that you imagine you are still free, and moving of your own accord to those resultant conclusions that arise so naturally. You look upon the inquirers who travel other roads as being necessarily less clever than yourself. They have doubtless not thought the question out. Some day, if they are keen enough, keen as you have been, they too will see the light and come to your conclusions. You pity them. Your own faith is built upon a rock.—Yes, it is true that these apparently remote questions are significant. Granted that we want our philosophy to be reasoned and reasonable, these subtle matters are fully as important as Mr. Russell maintains. A training in such matters, an intensive study of them, is as necessary for the philosopher as mathematics for the physical chemist. All this we may grant Mr. Russell.

But philosophy? Shall we make philosophy into a science? Reduce our philosophy without remainder even to this most metaphysical and ultimate of sciences? Consider. Does not the philosophy that abates one jot of her old pretensions abdicate her throne altogether? Is it not the boast and glory of philosophy that she takes

the universe for her province, and admits no bounds to her empire; that her thoughts go out to the ends of the world, and her rule and compass span all the infinities? "But," you say, "limitation is requisite for success; too bold an ambition will overreach itself and philosophy will fail." And is it, then, such a lamentable thing to fail? Are there not tasks wherein to try, though you try and fail, is a greater distinction than all the smug successes you could win in lesser ventures? It is better, we say to Mr. Russell, that philosophy should remain philosophy, a splendid failure, than that it should renounce its high calling to win a more commonplace success. If philosophers to-day are wary of system-building and take conceit in the modesty of their aims, it is because they lack courage and lack power. He who is too afraid of being in the wrong stands an excellent chance of never being in the right either. Better a downright false philosophy, contrary to obvious fact, than a philosophy that is a nullity. Intellectual modesty may be a personal virtue in a philosopher, but philosophy can not itself be modest and remain a philosophy. That philosophy should constantly strive to emulate the precision and impersonality and justice in weighing the evidence which distinguish science, is, we grant and proclaim, a worthy and necessary ideal. A philosopher should never for a moment forget that his most cherished theories are, once and for all, theories; that he does not know everything; and that the feeling of absolute assurance is excellent evidence of failure to see the other side which every philosophical question possesses; but, all this notwithstanding, he, as a philosopher, is still bound to have opinions and plenty of them, and the courage of his opinions; and when he stops being bold, stops following his opinions to their uttermost extent, he ceases to be a philosopher, and becomes not a cautious scientist, but a nonentity. Philosophy is that science which abstracts from nothing, that science to which nothing is alien and for which nothing is negligible, and therefore is philosophy not a science at all. Philosophy is philosophy.

But what then is the sort of achievement to which philosophy looks forward? There are at least two types of aims which have been mixed up together under the one title of philosophy, and they need to be discriminated from one another, as well as from science and art. We might call them theoretical and practical philosophy, yet the terms mean little until explained.

Theoretical philosophy is a sort of knowledge. But the characteristic trait of it is that, while scientific knowledge is accomplished when facts are known, known as they are, philosophical knowledge is then no more than ready to begin. The facts now need to be interpreted and understood. This interpretation is not an evaluation of good and bad, and it is not necessarily a seeking behind and beneath the facts

for some reason and ground that explains why things are as they are. It may well be that the facts in question are simply brute data, without reason and without worth. But the interpretation which the philosopher gives of those facts consists always and essentially in a notable widening of the purview. It is a widening, to use the terminology of the old association psychology, by both contiguity and similarity. Where do these facts stand in a larger context? How do they compare with other facts like them or differing from them. The mere widening by contiguity might be done by science, though never so fully done. But the widening by similarity and contrast is much more peculiarly philosophical, in so far as it asks for the instituting of comparisons, not merely with what is, but with what might be; and it opens to the philosopher not only the realm of the actual, but the limitless stretches of the ideal and possible; introduces him to things even forever impossible in this world of ours, yet not impossible in themselves. Now there is no philosophic value in castles in the air, whatever may be their artistic beauty. The only value from the intellectual study of the ideal and the possible is when it throws a new light of contrast or likeness upon the actual, reveals what is contingent in the actual and so could be otherwise, reveals the facts of the strange arbitrariness of many an aspect of this world of ours, until the common things of earth take on an arresting wonder and mystery. And such comparison reveals likewise similarities and analogies among things the most diverse, threads of likeness or relation that knit together things far remote.

All this is an intellectual inquiry. But it is an intellectual inquiry which has no peculiar subject-matter. Philosophy can begin anywhere; the characteristic of it is only that it never rests where it began. It is never satisfied with knowledge of given fact, however well certified to. It looks out beyond. And it is an intellectual inquiry the truth of whose results, though very much the same as the truth of science in being some correspondence of knowledge and things, is subject to tests which are not merely any pragmatic ones of success or of leading into touch with facts. If there is successful leading involved, it is ever a success plus an interpretation of that success. This point is not altogether peculiar to philosophical knowledge, but it assumes a special importance there. No comparison, for instance, can ever be tested by merely being led to the things compared, and especially so when one of those things compared does not exist at all. Yet every proposition we utter has its contradictory, as is a commonplace of logic, a commonplace with very uncommonplace implications. For we can never judge without asserting that something is this way and not otherwise, thereby comparing the way it is with the way it might be, but nevertheless is not. And only the

simplicity, or apparent simplicity, of this comparison leads us to ignore its presence, as so regularly we do. The only test of a comparison is another comparison; you get more data and you compare again. The things are doubtless given as like or different, but they do not compare themselves. There is, therefore, no return from a comparison into a flow of non-intellectualized experience, no goal of merely immediate recontact with fact. Therefore it follows that the progress of theoretical philosophy, which thus looks wider and brings in new items to compare, is to be contrasted with any such sort of practical interest in making machines and keeping us fed which is often, justly or unjustly, considered the final aim of scientific knowledge. A philosophical inquiry furnishes means only for more philosophical inquiry; it is a self-perpetuating process. Philosophy leads, of itself, naturally and only to more philosophy. If it is to have value at all, it must be because it is worth while in itself, that it is its own excuse for being. Though it is not for the theoretical philosophy to estimate its own worth to human inquirers, there are those of us who, as practical philosophers of the type to be mentioned in a moment, do come to consider it as a priceless privilege to philosophize so, because it is a great and noble thing to stand apart from the world and yet have knowledge of it; to stand apart, not plunge in, as Bergson bids us do, for only he who is not too much immersed in the game can see all things in their just proportions; to stand apart, the clear-headed critic, and say to the harshest of brute facts, "You are but accidents after all," saying to that which bulks greatest in our foreground, "You are, in the total of the great world-prospect, a very trifling thing."

But there is, and we have just referred to it, another sort of philosophy. Practical philosophy is a matter not so much of knowledge as of will. There may be things valuable which are simply found to be so, about which we can say there is a true view and a false one. It is then a matter for intellectual inquiry to find out which is which. If all value is of this sort, there is little or no ultimate place for what we have here termed practical philosophy, save as an emotional acceptance of given truths about values. But our present situation is not ultimate nor ever will be. And it does indeed seem obviously true of us in our present situation, as well as at least possibly a permanent factor that would survive into even the most ideally ultimate point of view, that sometimes our judgment, "This is good," means really a fiat of ours, "Let this be my good." We have here a sort of thing that never becomes a matter of ordinary truth and falsity. There are those, it is true, who maintain, as does for instance Professor John Dewey, if we do not misinterpret him, that such fiats are really propositions, which are not true as first uttered, but are made true or false

by some one's considering them as if true and living accordingly, so that he thus experimentally finds out whether he is still willing to accept them after trial. But there is no real objectivity gained even so; the result arrived at must again be accepted in a fiat, "Let this be my good." If the primary decree has a proviso, "Let this be my good, because it has these and these characters," the qualifying clause may indeed be refuted by experience, but that is due to its being an ordinary judgment of fact, not created by the willing of it. Such a "passing of judgment" on things, such evaluating of their final worth, is therefore in its essence a fiat of will, to be accepted or rejected, but never in an objective sense true or false.

Now, as a mere matter of fact, some of the most remarkable examples of what has been historically called philosophy have been fiats of this sort. They have been fiats of acceptance or rejection directed towards the universe in general, either towards the whole range of this our actual world, or towards some of those possible or ideal worlds which theoretical philosophy may dispassionately contrast with this of ours. It is generally such a valuation which we have in mind when we speak of a man's philosophy of life; it is what we mean when we speak of a national philosophy. We do not in such cases mean what men and nations think about the world. Doubtless they most often think very little. We mean how they feel about it, and towards what ideals their will is directed. It may also become more explicitly formulated, and embedded in the midst of many judgments of fact. But we have such a philosophy in any case wherein some one declares, "To this world of ours I say yes"; or when he says, "I hate these brutal facts; let us escape to where beauty is uncontaminated and reason free"; or when he says, "Let us accept this world; but looking on it with eyes that cease to desire, let us view it as a show, a spectacle, like the play-world wrought by the magic of some master-artist." Such a one is no longer a philosopher of the theoretical sort. His hopes and fears are in the game. His dreams and his aspirations have become weights in the balances. Truly he must, to deserve the name of philosopher, have still something of the theoretical basis to give him a content which he accepts or rejects; and something of the theoretical attitude also viewing at times his wildest dreams and his deepest aspirations with an eye that is clear-sighted and aloof. But in a practical philosophy there is always something more, a choice, a decision. Whether we call this element philosophy at all, or call it rather religion, or what not, that does not much matter. It seems to overlap one aspect of religion, yet to include other cases hardly to be termed religious. But it does matter a great deal to note that we have this sort of attitude. We have it all of us. The philosopher has it only more marked in degree, more self-conscious, more voluble in ex-

pression, than the layman. Mr. Bertrand Russell's *A Free Man's Worship* is a perfect illustration; though he most among contemporary philosophers has urged upon theoretical philosophy that it be impersonal, "appealing to less mundane hopes and fears." It is a primitive source of inspiration from which comes the driving force that carries the investigator across the more arid and arduous fields of strictly theoretical philosophies and abstract sciences, giving him a faith that that sort of activity is eminently worth while. Once and for all we do, every one of us, explicitly or otherwise, evaluate and pass judgment on the world; we do pass judgment on it as well as seek to know it; we decide where we will to stand, we choose and we reject.

And now our old question: "What, then, is the value of false philosophies?" Let us consider it from the standpoint, first, of theoretical, and then, of practical philosophy. There is, if our opinion be correct, no one theoretical philosophy towards which we are moving; we are moving towards a loosely coordinated group of ways of taking the world. Endless are the possibilities wherewith we may contrast it; inexhaustible by us are the comparisons of diverse aspects which we may set up. And herein is found the present value of any historical philosophy. Theoretically, Spinoza, for instance, may be false, for he meant to tell us about present reality and he told us wrong. We may think that we can disprove great sections of his philosophy, and with more knowledge we could disprove it all. The world is not built like that. But if Spinoza has, as a theoretical philosopher, done his work thoughtfully and well, he has furnished us with a sketch of a world that might be ours. It is a possible world, a plausible world. In the very considering, the very disproving of it, we must necessarily come to understand our world better by the contrast. Had Spinoza started with the explicit aim of creating a fiction, a dream-world, the chances are that he would not have given us anything so profitable to compare with the actual world as he has done; lacking in earnestness, his pen would have traced a caricature, a thing that could not live. The artist, limiting himself to one fragment of the concrete, may deal in fictions for their own sake; but the philosopher's task, set him by the tremendous elaboration of the world of fact, is too heavy a one to permit him to stray far from what he thinks is fact and not fiction. And even the artist seems to gather strength by nearness to the solid ground of actuality; the fancies of even *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are pale and empty, when set alongside the gripping reality of *Hamlet* or *King Lear*. But to us who read philosophy, and wish by its aid to understand our world better—to us, Spinoza, or Plato, or Hegel, or Immanuel Kant, must appear as often substituting fiction for fact. And we might study them, as too many a beginner studies the history

of philosophic thought, as illustrating the aberrations of the human mind. But we also may study them as part of philosophy, a living part to-day, and by no means a mere catalogue of dead and moldering errors. Our world will never be so well understood as by him who understands it in its likeness to, and contrasts with, the worlds of Plato, and Spinoza, and Kant. By their very departure from it, they furnish us a fulcrum outside the world of fact which will give us a leverage on it, a new standing-place whence our eye can more adequately survey it. To understand anything you must know more than it; from beyond and without it you must bring the standards by which it can be measured and judged. Such then is the theoretical value of false philosophy. Such is the reason why, though we read with only an amused curiosity many of the scientific blunders of the Greeks, we nevertheless turn to the philosophical pages of Plato and Aristotle with an eager desire to learn. Science, confining itself rigorously to the narrow limits of its actual subject-matter in hand, leaves its discovered errors hurriedly behind it, because they are to it a source of shame, and an uneasy warning to present science that it, too, is infected with mortality. But the progress of theoretical philosophy is one that can carry all its past with it, the richer by all that has been done; and can draw ever new profit from ancient error, as well as from ancient truth.

The errors of philosophy are not so directly relevant to practical philosophy, because the latter is, as we have seen, not to be judged by standards of truth and falsity. But an evaluation of the world which is to furnish any lasting satisfaction to one who has had his initiation into theoretic philosophy, must found itself on truth. If for instance, some particular evaluation of a world is of a world wherein man is the center of the physical universe, and it declares therefore that suns and stars move in order that he may have days for work and nights for rest,—that evaluation is not of this world we live in. But after all, seldom are the great evaluations much qualified by such conditions of true and false. There are, for example, optimists and pessimists among the mechanical philosophers; there are likewise both optimists and pessimists among the idealists; likewise there are on both sides those whose temperament leads them to declare that the matter of temperament is an impertinence. And philosophies, big and little, have been, and doubtless ever will be, saturated with these evaluations, almost as multifarious as philosophers have been numerous. Such evaluation can be more or less intelligent; it is so, however, only when there has been some sort of choice. Men are doubtless born with one or another philosophic temperament. But man can also be born again in philosophy, when he has appreciated and compared and deliberately chosen. But to do this he must guide his choice by con-

sideration of the great galaxy of previous choices and evaluations; not merely learning what Spinoza or Plato thought, but feeling within himself what it was they clove to, what it was they desired. He who would be a philosopher must learn to feel with the philosophers, as well as think with them; and pass judgments of final preference with them. And here their errors are seldom to be dwelt upon; but the tone and color and flavor of their vision are a priceless heritage, a new glory that is given to all mankind.

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PURPOSE AS A CONSCIOUS CONCEPT

IN their repudiation of anthropomorphism as a method of explanation both scientists and philosophers agree. The significance of mechanism as explanation has been such a hard won and widely profitable achievement that any suggestion to curtail its application naturally arouses vigorous opposition. But that there may be advocated a method of procedure the converse of anthropomorphism, carrying in its train consequences which may be no less serious, appears to be not so generally recognized. That is, in contrast to psychomorphism (the modern refinement of the older anthropomorphism) physicomorphism (if I may be allowed to use the expression) is practised when physical concepts are applied to a realm where their employment is not so much superfluous for explanation as it is unintelligible. To extend mechanical description so as to include all activities of living beings is, I take it, an instance of this nature.

Professor Warren's study of purpose¹ with its point of departure in the analysis of conscious purpose affords a particularly valuable basis for the thesis I wish to elaborate in this paper. The biological approach to the discussion, while the fundamental conclusion is in general agreement with the position of Professor Warren, has proceeded (and naturally so) in the direction of proving that experimental evidence is favorable to the physiochemical conception of certain activities of living beings characterized as purposeful. The further implication is suggested that all organic activities may eventually be included under the same rubric. Here, psychological categories are assimilated to biological, purpose is one type of physiochemical description. In Professor Warren's discussion, on the other hand, it is a significant fact that the analysis of the conscious experi-

¹ *A Study of Purpose*, this JOURNAL, Vol. XIII. (1916).